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FOLK-LORE OF STONE TOOLS.¹

THE curious notions that prevail regarding stone tools the world over are well known to folk-lore students and archæologists. On the subject in America, however, little has as yet been gathered. It is a field which will well repay research by the members of our Society. We may look for such material under three groups:—

A. Native Lore of Indians.

- (1) Ideas respecting the power of Stone Tools.
- (2) Notions regarding their origin.

B. Immigrant Lore of Whites.

- (3) Superstitions regarding origin and power.

Our Indians are too near their own Stone Age for a great volume of such notions to have arisen among them. Yet we may see its beginnings.

Stone axes, if ever, are seldom made among the Pueblos of New Mexico at the present day. Nor are they used for their original purpose to any extent. Many are, however, treasured among the people, and looked upon with respect as things that have come down from ancestors. C. Carter Blake says: "I was at a little house called San Nicolas, in the Chontales Hills (the owner of which, Señorita Justa Aragon, was perhaps the only pretty half-breed girl I ever saw), and observed a celt, formed of green diorite, being used to crush maize on the rough quartzose piedra which served as a mill. . . . I had never seen a similar case, and offered the young lady a handsome price for it, but she replied that it had come down from heaven in a thunder-storm, and had been an heirloom amongst her Indian ancestors for many years. It furthermore insured the retention of perpetual virtue to the maiden who should grind maize with it. Under the circumstances I was obliged to abandon the negotiation."

In Emmons' MS. Catalog of his Alaska Collection in the American Museum of Natural History, we find that "such value was placed upon these stone implements in early days that, when the man of the house started out to cut with one, the wife must refrain from all merriment and conduct herself becomingly, lest the instrument break."

No. 169 in Emmons' Collection was worn as a charm by an old Indian, though he admitted that it had once been an adze. Certain stone knives in the same series had come to be tribal property, and were looked upon with veneration. Mr. Henshaw says that stone

¹ Abstract of a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, November 29, 1890, by Prof. Frederick Starr, of New York, N. Y.

plummets are called sorcery stones by the Santa Barbara Indians of California, who say that they are used by medicine men in making rain, curing the sick, and in ceremonies.¹

Curious notions are already found regarding the origin of stone tools. The California Indians told Mr. Frost that stone arrowheads were "no good," that they were made by the lizards.² The Twanas of the Northwest claim that they were made by the wolf before he degenerated to his present form.³ Mr. De Cost Smith, of our Society, tells me that among the Dakotas it is believed that they are made by spiders, and that an Indian told him he had found one after he drove the spider away!

Of immigrant belief of this kind we *ought* to find much. I know of but two cases. In Porto Rico, stone axes and arrowheads are called *piedras-de-rayo*, — "thunder-stones." I am assured that the belief in the thunderbolt origin of grooved stone axes prevails in Bollinger County, Missouri.

On this paper Mr. A. F. Chamberlain remarked as follows: The Ottawas have a curious explanation for the piles of flints found on the surface of the ground. Ne-naw-bo-zhoo, the demigod, pursued his wicked brother who had a body of stone, and every time he struck him with his club the chips would fly off. At last he succeeded in killing him, and a mass of flinty rock near Antrim City, Michigan, marks the spot where the carcass of the monster lies.⁴ A somewhat similar legend is said to be current among the Iroquois and Cherokees.

In a Passamaquoddy myth related by Leland,⁵ we find mention of "thunder-bullets," or *bed-dags k'chisousan*, as they are called. It is a sign of good luck to find one of these stones.

Rev. W. M. Beauchamp, in his interesting article on "The Origin and Early Life of the New York Iroquois,"⁶ tells us that the Mohawks, in 1667, gathered from the shore of Lake Champlain "pieces of flint nearly all cut into shape." As to the origin of these, "the Indians explained that some invisible men in the lake prepared these weapons. If the Indians gave them plenty of tobacco, the supply became abundant."

There are doubtless other stories of a similar kind, which would be not less interesting.

¹ *American Naturalist*, vol. xx. p. 87: Henshaw.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xxii. p. 479: Frost.

³ *Smithsonian Annual Report*, 1878, p. 236: Eels.

⁴ A. J. Blackbird: *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan* (1887), p. 76.

⁵ *Algonquin Legends of New England*, p. 265.

⁶ *Trans. Oneida Histor. Soc.* 1887-1889, p. 135.